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# Statehood in Selves

Maren Schiffer  
*University of Montana*

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STATEHOOD IN SELVES

By

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Bachelor of Arts in English, Whitman College, Walla Walla, Washington, 2014

Thesis

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Creative Writing

Statehood in Selves

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# STATEHOOD IN SELVES

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“One of the maxims of practical education that governed my childhood:  
‘Don’t eat with your mouth open.’”  
—Colette, *Prisons et paradis*

“The imagination penetrates life.”  
—Wallace Stevens

**I.**  
**Punishments**



## **Picturesque Punishments**

When I pay attention to the fact that my imagination is a man,  
will you stop paying attention to me?

Startle your imagination awake, yes, across the field so it

cannot sleep the little

trigger might bring out the holy

my ears and my blood at once

a pricked circle

I struck a knife in my poem and came out with a man

I need more imagination in my poems. More body outside the body,  
more outside in the body

You slept in today, again

Last night Molly was my student. I said, "Well this is awkward Molly,  
you know that I like you. We're just going to have to pretend that I'm  
evaluating you." Her hair was as straight as it's ever been.

Dreams don't count. If you strike a bleeding heart, this poem may work.

An organ throbs in my palm, I don't know whose.

Good, but throb? Follow the rules of strangeness, and you will  
obtain me.

Tommy told me he's noticed that I don't write when something is  
triggering me politically.

My cunt is cold and there are not two fish swimming up and down  
inside of me (one red and one blue) from my head to my toes.

I have lost my train of thought.

If there is a train of thought, that would mean my mind is inside of it.  
Yes? My body is in my mind is aboard the train is in my mind.  
If there is a train of thought, I imagine it's a toy one. My fingers crack  
its plastic wheels off, bend the front ones off their course.  
It is red and yellow, primary.

What do primary colors signal in the brain?  
I categorize their feelings and their politics.  
Is it a masculine achievement, to solve the rubik's cube?

My cunt is cold and there are no longer two fish swimming up and down  
inside of me (one red and one blue) from my head to my toes.  
The dirt outside is dampening, and it is dark in the morning  
when I need to wake.

I imagine my body being taken being taken.

This morning I walked to the writing desk  
and dishes spilled out.

If you listen to the birds, they will tell you.

The crows are picking on the lame one's wing.

Sometimes I think you do not choose me.

You have never washed my hair or woven my beard  
into your blankets. You are too rooted in yourself.

When you took my body to the desk, I had the window.

Last night, when I brought my body to the liquor store

I thought about the poet

spilling her feeble guts elegantly by a river

collecting them in her arms

offering them to female lovers

thinking them scarce and lacking.

I considered an imitation there

a devotion outside of the stomach, the intestines

something to say, now my turn.

But there was no need.



When I imagined summoning you, I imagined  
your hands descending, and your light.  
I imagined what you wanted, and I opened myself.

You were with someone else.

Why is it that we use “endure” for winter?  
A coming out as an end when there isn’t one.

Where is the magnificence?

Before I sat at the desk, I sat in my Volkswagon and listened to the radio. My neighbor walked out barefoot and took a picture of the house's exterior. "Who is it for?" "A beginning," he said.

You are losing your sight of direction and end.  
Why do you turn to me for healing?

The posture rests its teeth on my torso.

When I talk to the imagination, I understand

imagination is the figure wrapping plastic around the body my

to follow the morning routine.

My docile body reaches for guidance.

The docile body believes in its need for guidance.

Imagination tells me to find strategic control.

Our contract is not available to me when I am not good.

I am guilty for tending the garden I don't have, and for dragging a mop on the floor I do.

I am guilty for reaching my finger into my lover's mouth and feeling around in this long  
generosity.

I am guilty for not tending the garden I have, and for dragging a mop on the floor I don't.





## My Garden Far From the Beach

My garden is getting very perfect.  
The parsnips spit leaves, worms opening  
dirt. These worms.

My hand has asked me to perform.

If I grasp

the edges of my ribs on the shoulders, am I back in myself, kissing

myself. If I grasp the pointed mollusk

it will fall.

My garden far from the beach

Growth in the humid summer. When fire I let the tomatoes die.  
Pick them green for frying.

If there were a goat, he would eat the dead.

I offer my lips to my torso.

This is what I wanted but it is not an outward offering.

I would have liked a real garden for my baby.

My baby I had too young and carried with me

I forgot her in a gathering of people. I sacrificed my body  
to a rocket play, almost.

Test run.

I backed out before being shot

out. I drew anger. My baby.

The audience was disappointed in me, considering

that after I backed out

none of the other volunteers were blown apart by the fire.



## Please Disregard the Leaves

I want to walk alone and let my fingers get stiff in the cold.

I want to get to the city and manipulate my torso through crowds, even though

I have nowhere to be.

As I walk, I want my body's momentum to open men's blazers  
without touching.

The other night we cut apart pumpkins, and I forgot the procedure.

Pulp clung to my skin, needy

Thank you for breathing, I whisper to my intimates.

There is chaos in the order of demands. You pour the drink calmly.

Three runners in opalescent vests.

A white supremacist smashed someone's skull in. My aunt said  
praise Trump and Kissinger is proof. In Cambodia, he.

Mountain snow yesterday, running dogs in its arrival.

It has become increasingly difficult to shave my head. Each time I try, a  
man appears with a razor and asks, are you sure. He opens the car door  
to a backseat full of products for bald heads. It is the waiting that gets  
me, his pants pressed, hair short on the sides. This is not what I meant  
by shaving.

I am sorry for abandoning you with our meal.

## **We Go to a Hot Springs**

conversation coming at me, I take razor to bony outers, inners  
before outers, pointers to my cunt.

Or, I shave the inside of the bony outers  
in a blue tiled shower in which the water tastes of rust.

The armpits and the legs are forgiven, I say.

It is hard to strip three parts of the body, which is warm.

To undress, to find soap, find razor, clean blade, let the water run hot.

In the shower, my hairs drag on hot springs pool, skimming surface from above.

Time is in my jaws and I know it and am made to know it.

## **We Go to a Falls**

Charred trees, outsides only.

Snow below and not in town.

I heard geese rise, pushing two logs together

as a result of their rising. You laughed.

I was frightened by geese. No, I was frightened

by the force of logs hitting each other

in a space of creatures hiding.

The isolation of our presences. Why is it the butt of the joke to be startled?

Bunny runs in front, dumb bunny. Go bunny. Bunny freeze.

Not to deviate, but.



A rabbit runs in front, dumb rabbit. Go rabbit. Rabbit freeze. Is it a cute one or a.

I want to make it cute.

Startle rabbit imagine in bed. Cocaine rabbit run. Move rabbit. Rabbit go.

I am sick of rabbits. If you open my labia and insert cocaine, will a rabbit emerge? I will not move no. The curtain is closed.



## II. Autonomy

## Mission

“Santa Barbara Mission has been designated  
a registered National Historic Landmark. Under the provisions  
of the historic site act of August 21, 1935 this site possesses  
exceptional value in commemorating and illustrating  
the history of the United States.  
U.S. Department of the Interior. 1961”

Some days, it's easier to speak  
in statehoods than in selves.

I was in one place and now

I am in another.

I was in one place and now  
another belongs to me.

In California, there is a trail  
of buildings that I was taught  
to follow. Some are even so lucky  
as to employ the use of a yellow bus  
to facilitate this following  
of trail from one end of coastline  
to another.

The trail suggests a forward  
motion, an accomplishment  
of obtaining knowledge.

A scavenger hunt can be bought  
in the form of flattened pennies,  
building imprinted on “head.”

Interior imprinted on “tail.”

On the grounds  
of the buildings, Latin  
and Spanish are rolled out  
as tarps.

Underneath the tarps  
there was language.

The name of these buildings  
is mission, but the word so early on  
becomes like church and like bank  
only with an air of distinction.  
Church and bank.

How mission wants to be sedentary  
once it was accomplished.  
What is the interior value.

People are always on  
to the next big thing  
like where is the art and the beauty.  
I want the art and the beauty.  
I’m tired of blank statehood,  
which is not a metaphor

for the internal state.

What is rolled over.

What is commemorated.



## Autonomy

Autonomy, say it four times fast

of a region  
of a country

condition the right or  
the condition of  
self-government

a country  
a region  
a particular sphere

a country  
or a region  
a self governing  
a plural noun

from control  
a freedom  
from external influence

"the rebels called for regional autonomy  
and self-government"

In searching for our regional autonomy  
I have found more abstract terms in sand.

The self-government of the self by the self

self-government for the self of the self

They withhold the focused hand  
the direction and its origins blurred  
stop when has it myself  
an outside self to obey

## At the Institution in Crisis

The marching band is playing Weezer with all of their horns, and I am doing everything I can to keep from crying on this milked lawn with scattered strangers. They cut money away, again. Yesterday, my student wrote about her dance studio as her refuge. It smells like dirty feet, and it's dark and calm, and I can leave myself behind. She was standing above the crowd today. I chastised her for checking her email in class last week, and I hate myself for it. Was I out of reach, of solidarity? The band lifts their horns, and some people are celebrating their music, dancing as an awkward and expected duty.

In the bathroom, I update myself on votes. Jeff Flake may or may not be a glimmer. Steve Daines declares that the great people of Montana are standing behind him as he votes for Kavanaugh. I comment on his post. There are women, scattered, saying I stand with Kavanaugh. I want to say, You dirty fucking scumbag, I hope the elk on the wall in your office tramples you. Or rather I want to stab something like a carrot into his heart. I don't. I want to write "complicit" on all the "We are griz" flags on campus. I don't.

A man I met told me he pinned a teenager against a wall for vandalizing an advertisement. "What was the advertisement for?" "I don't remember." I would like to let my nails grow.

I go outside, look for my student in her aviators and sweats and knee-length sweater. Hope to see her dancing, but the crowd has dispersed.

## Jeff Flake is Sleeping Right Now

In my kitchen, I think of Rhio

muscle wrapped intently

over a pole

Yesterday, I could not fall asleep

I texted my lovers in desperation

I miss you. I am thinking of your time zone

My body is a pool of zucchini butter

sweeter than one would expect

still no one to witness

Last week, Evan

in Greenough Park said rose hips

We each filled a palm

They rotted in our fridge

Senators are on my body in my body

I call them one by one into my kitchen

When they understand I will beg

they elect one to reach down my throat

and feel for the bladder

What is gained from getting close?

I place my hand flat on the wood table

Through blinds, can I be seen?

Three Mornings  
*after Philip Whalen*

I

My alarm goes off and it's the news. I lie there for an hour, and when it switches to children's programming I keep it on to ccccccoooooommmmmfort myself. I stink. I want to fuck myself, or slip myself into a side-angled wall shelf to sleep alternatively, in another space moved. I curse myself for letting myself not operate.

2

The bed the clock the bed and I am Steve Inskeep. I am Steve Inskeep. Blinds lip and my upstairs neighbor grinds coffee, Kerry, a comfort, and runs in front of my window to her car without seeing me.

3

I shower and I need it. I will wear pajamas today. Dark, already, and Evan's spoon viciously hits the bowl as it attempts to pierce yogurt. I woke up sweat, entangled, yesterday not so. Yesterday a pressure on cold, a breakfast, I missed you. Today is back to today. Today the sour coffee, but I want the sour, and my upstairs neighbor's shower pulls down the ceiling just enough and it is light and I am here with my keyboard, my water, my touch—no, my goosebumps. There's a movie in which an old man grabs a cold piece of toast and with urgency goes for a walk in green fields. Many mornings, he is my moral compass in difference, as I put my toast back in the oven to warm it, and I am not my toast, and I am not the man, and I am not Kerry (though sometimes I pretend), and I am not and so on. A kid pauses at the chain link fence and turns her eyes mischievous as she runs across our lawn.

## I Took the Quiet Way Home

I came out to my dad in his old VW, scraps of unmoved life from the center console: museum nametag, mints, an assortment of broken pens.

The upholstery has ripped.

When he talks of gayness, he talks of Pema Chodron.

Hope and fear come from feeling that we lack something: they come from a sense of poverty. We can't simply relax with ourselves.

I run my index finger over the vents, over and over, greying with dust. Dusting.

Theism is a deep-seated conviction that there's some hand to hold: if we just do the right things, someone will appreciate us and take care of us.

And yet we are here, watching the lawn brown and ice, squirrels a mechanistic clockwork. Up and down, chase, chatter.

By the Mississippi River, Vonda teased: If you pass a funeral motorcade, then you must relinquish one year of your life.

I say: If you come out at age 57, then you must come out to everyone.

KayceeWyomingKayceeWyomingWyoming

If you come out at age 57, then you must fear your daughter's opinions.

If you fear your daughter's opinions, then you cannot answer her questions.

If you are his daughter, you must ask, was time wasted.

If you are his daughter, you must be objective.

If you are subjective, you are granted permission to mourn the liberation your father did not receive.

If you are subjective, you are granted permission to mourn the liberation your mother did not receive.

Barack Obama in 2008 said, "I believe marriage is between a man and a woman. I am not in favor of gay marriage."

My uncle in 2015 said, Look look. Over there. Go back.

If you want to go back, you are reactionary. If you are reactionary, progress is make-believe.

If you are reactionary, you are oriented in a loop of longing.

My dad in 2015 said, Let the horse feel your breath, she'll remember you next year.

**Instigator**

I'm sorry.



## Kindnesses

What frightens me is when language becomes barren. When I see the open plain of what I want and what they want and it's laid out in front. Then I have to look at it instead of being in it. I have to admire the matter-of-factness.

I am on field, clutching a horse's  
ribs between adductors of thighs leaning  
over to encompass his neck and pull warmth  
from his neck. Letting his gamed body  
and hairs into my nostrils and thus  
body. Letting him lower his neck to eat wet  
grass but not too much, listening to squares  
of layered and decaying skeleton pulverizing the sweet  
at last unthinking but for joy  
Using his body to let go of my body

My aunt posted on facebook: " 'we must never forget, every time we sit on a horse, what an extraordinary privilege it is: to be able to unite one's body with that of another sentient being, one that is stronger, faster and more agile by far than we are, and uncommonly forgiving.' "

–William Steinkraus

My aunt posted on facebook: pull the lever.

The government has still not found the eighty children it has lost.

Tonight, the woman  
at the coffee shop gave me  
warm, bitter coffee, didn't ask questions.  
She wrapped the extra pastries in plastic  
and lined them on the windowsill outside.

I took a picture, didn't see someone behind me waiting for me to move to grab a pastry.  
Regretted picture. Unkindness.

There is the corner, the forest garbage, the green and hazy streetlight. My car to go into.

Let the horse feel your breath, she'll remember you next year.

## At Night, Thought is Time

I'm a little girl playing with a small dollhouse. I familiarize myself with the small furniture, the reversible rug the size of my palm. Touching the small objects ignites in me a craving, greed. I want to handle them again, stick my head inside a room that I can manipulate with my fingers.

This morning, I say thought is time. Thought and time are an investment. I say, you are an asset. Your ideas are valuable.

I watch a bad sitcom that parodies telenovelas but more so inhabits and honors the telenovela mindset. It invests in it. It bets on it.

A guy in his late teens loves Nike. He's invested in it. He says that in their ads, they've always used race in a risky way. When I ask him to invest more time thinking about this, he doesn't want to.

Sometimes I worry that I'll squeeze an animal, or shake it. Sarah talks about the wire wrapping around the head, the torso, constricting the skin as much as it can be. Cutting into. I worry that when the investments in me have begun to wrap, have begun to cut, I will shake an animal to death.

## **Respond as Wyoming**

1. Who is Mike Enzi?
2. What beauty in waiting for cattle to cross the road?
3. Family is family?
4. When do you put elbow grease into it?
5. But who does he think, a loft in Venice Beach?
6. In what ways can you make a horse love you?
7. Why aren't the liberals?
8. Who is Mike Enzi?
9. Tell me the story of how Missions were built.
10. What did it feel like to ride Ladybug?
11. Why are the coastals so--?
12. When you glide over meadowgrass, is it?
13. Mom, what am I memorizing here?
14. Who is Mike Enzi?
15. I remember the color of dirt at the ranch.
16. What words can we eat here?
17. What will you wear today?
18. Who is Matthew Shepherd?
19. Who is Mike Enzi?
20. What is a tutu?
21. In Orange County, it was just an accident.
22. It's not the same if I, is it?
23. Why are cows afraid of larkspur?

## **Respond as California**

1. Who is Mike Enzi?
2. What beauty in waiting for cattle to cross the road?
3. Family is family?
4. When do you put elbow grease into it?
5. But who does he think, a loft in Venice Beach?
6. In what ways can you make a horse love you?
7. Why aren't the liberals?
8. Who is Mike Enzi?
9. Tell me the story of how Missions were built.
10. What did it feel like to ride Ladybug?
11. Why are the coastals so--?
12. When you glide over meadowgrass, is it?
13. Mom, what am I memorizing here?
14. Who is Mike Enzi?
15. I remember the color of dirt at the ranch.
16. What words can we eat here?
17. What will you wear today?
18. Who is Matthew Shepherd?
19. Who is Mike Enzi?
20. What is a tutu?
21. In Orange County, it was just an accident.
22. It's not the same if I, is it?
23. Why are cows afraid of larkspur?

## Tasks from On Top of a Horse

I could write about larkspur.

How I can never remember its name or what it looks like.

At least I can't hold the two simultaneously.

Larkspur bobs in the wind, etc. etc.

Larkspur kills cattle, Dad reminds Gram reminds.

Let's say we were to list its qualities, just for fun.

Let's say the first and the last qualities we think of are the only ones that matter.

Let's say one outweighs the other.

Let's say violet, downward, bobbing, violent.

## A Man Attempted to Scam My Mom on match.com

He used language like “trustworthy” “loving” and “honesty”  
and that is how she knew.

“You have such a beautiful smile,” he wrote.

A ponytailed man said he was my friend. Gave me dust-frosted  
grapes, tried to put one in my mouth and I turned.

I don’t see him, his hand is on the small of my back.

The grapes, they sat in my fridge looming toxic. Their sugars  
began to infiltrate my perfect raw chicken.

Who’s to judge me if I step on them and throw them in the alley.  
I want them out, and I let them stay.

If you wanted in to my paypal  
you didn’t ask.

If you wanted in to my chicken soup  
you didn’t ask.

The grapes are making me cry, and I swear it’s not the grapes, it’s  
completely the grapes.

“I see you’re an artist. Tell me about your art.”

If you take my money, will you want my left lacrimal, too?  
From behind the left eye, thin and scale.

If you take my money, will you want my femur, too?

To prepare marrow, saw the femur lengthwise

and in thirds. Roast and serve on a wooden plank with bread.

I did it to a cow once.  
Made a tender meal.

Eating marrow requires scraping softness from cortical bone,  
from the small of my back, from my aching bank account.

I don't want to write about marrows.

You imagine my skeleton, my skeleton walks hierarchical.

## On Relatability

I went to a reading where a man wrote from the perspective of murderers who held a woman hostage on the side of a road, somewhere in Texas, with oil jobs. He is a writer and does not have an oil job. He noted that her sports bra was especially sweat-trailed in the back between her blades and in the front, dripping into her breasts. Was this a moment of relief in the plot? I have recreated it.

My clothing has formed a deep trail through my bedroom and into the hallway because the apartment is empty of people besides me. I have been here before.  
I hear the bubbles rise behind me, shocking my own ears with their force.

Many articles came out after Netflix released a series about Ted Bundy's victims. They came out to use the pleasure of looking at his symmetrical face for self-entertainment, and they came out to talk about this pleasure. They came out to say, he got away with it, and you are his alibi. Information and pornography are the same.

I can see into my neighbors' kitchen, and when their light is off, I can see into their neighbors' kitchen, too. Their refrigerator is covered with magnets and pictures, like mine. A relief. It is hard to distinguish who is and who is not an autodidact.

When I say I often live to please people, what I mean is that it is easy to remain calm in the bounds of this room, to hunch my posture enough to relax them.

There is no end to looking away from one another when we are all occupying our kitchens.



## A Landscape, What Gives

When I was in summer the corn fields were open  
suffocating    would you say this is correct

I am saying    if we follow each other  
from cornfield to cornfield is this suffocation or freedom

We are dying here    but we tend to our stomachs

which have been growling    so relentlessly lately  
I am beginning to wonder    what they are predicting

Everything I do    is a sidestep in a dance  
I cannot master

Even the leaves I have been collecting on the dresser  
are moving    despite my intentions

One thing I think of my sex    it will never  
be comfortable    more than twice a month

Figuerola mountain has poppies yes I haven't  
been    My game is to plan trips there

only to find poppies elsewhere and never realize  
the trip    This is how it goes

the radiator setting stays the same

I would like to make you a feast  
of sweet corn    salted so precisely it hurts the tongue

Is it for me or for you?  
Both of us yes    the frost is growing

When I am explained to about the cotton  
I once put between my legs    I see this is what hurt is

On my phone screen I see a wide red bowling shirt  
I proclaim it a shirt    I am near my ribcage almost

I am happy to smoke alone  
though surely I know      you will join me please

A different white woman explained colonization today  
fury only felt with distance      I know it well

this northern state aches      under wind

I wonder      Do you see  
we are not sewing      anything okay

I would like to throw glass soda cans  
against the building

Will you join me      in the dark  
when it's done

## Second Thought Poem

it was late afternoon  
near an avocado box.  
She held my hand and let  
go to feel the fruit, the smooth  
skins. That song by the Doors  
was playing and she thought  
about mentioning lipmarks  
on the singer's grave,  
a phenomenon empty  
in its romance.

## Indoor Poem

house in which dead leaves  
bundle under their tree  
I worry it hasn't grown  
since I've taken over  
my neighbor pulls in  
his truck looking  
especially tired, I wave  
and he smokes his cigarette  
while asking his friend  
on the phone  
if it's foggy also in Detroit.

## Indoor Poem II

the pine tree across the street  
is too tall for this window's  
perspective. It drops cones  
and other green parts  
onto the neighbor's gravel.  
The long-limbed boy  
runs by, looking forward,  
dribbles his ball toward a hoop.

## No Big Deal Poem

The laundry spins dry  
clothes falling as the basket slows

someone says  
they can make clouds into keyboards

another person says that's false  
It is still too cold for lying outside

and yet my sister sings open  
like it's not a problem

My water has tasted of milk  
It must be the start of a season

## Savings

Being harassed by a banker feels worse  
than it sounds in a story.

Maybe when I survey the street  
in snow another night  
something will be different  
and remind me of location's  
temporality or the fragility of  
neighborhoods.

When a nearby house  
caught on fire there was a buzz  
of clues but no one wanted  
to bother the neighbors.

The fact that  
no one was harmed  
made it all a little better  
or should I say  
we grew comfortable  
in our excitement.

We never did ask for direct  
states of the situation.

My sister has an extra rib  
and I like to bring it up  
to say yes my peripheral identity  
is cohesive and strange  
but not too strange.

I haven't brought up the rib  
in quite a long  
time as I have been preoccupied  
by other things, for example  
what is acceptable sustenance

and does the ice harden as it melts.  
This vitamin d capsule  
has turned my perspective  
around and while my pee is neon  
I believe this is an optimistic sign  
of things turning around,  
regaining control  
from named and unnamed  
authorities. I will name one, the endless clouds  
over our town. I will name another,  
these airport walls.  
I am beginning to understand  
that selling sincerity may not be a viable  
source of income, especially not  
at the markets I frequent in summer.  
I don't mourn this. Perhaps  
I've been saved from unnecessary  
disappointment.  
Can one's sincerity  
remain blissful when it has been  
questioned? There are still  
directly sincere questions  
to be asked. Like, why  
when I consider my money  
do I account for financial losses  
by indebting future time?  
Soon I will have a dog  
in the house to jump  
on the couch by the window  
when I come home, making me account  
for the hours I have left him alone  
with nothing to do.



## Last Rabbit

Anna is living in Paris a man followed her with his  
dick out and this is I forgot something that happens  
happens when I went out in Paris and a man  
approaches to say you are ugly or follows you for fun  
The bicycle at night is powerful until a man stops it  
with his hands his other body part being the tongue out  
You wonder why I like women so much  
and the man in my life it is true is exceptional

When we made paella Carlos  
butchered a rabbit I didn't want to perform  
Lean hunch this creature looks like he resigned  
for survival which is death his teeth I imagine  
would have been quite straightforward the previous  
butcher didn't leave them

In a circle of people I proposed the presence of city rabbit  
the right word the only word for the little rabbits in our  
dying / survived industrial city it was never mine  
A man said city rabbit like country mouse and I thought  
not quite I would though like you to write us a nursery  
I think finally rabbits are growing old for me in my poems

The snow is  
building up on the sidewalk and no one has moved it  
It is already clean my neighbor gets paid yes I was nice  
once or twice though and her labor inside me uncomfortable  
but I would like to be paid to clean snow I only am generous  
when I need to apologize or when I did a cruel thing  
to a different creature It's a theory but many theories are true  
given the right circumstances Kate said an actor  
left people he loved by the river or by their failed relationship  
being a too calm park at night and so that is why he dances  
with strangers I have never left anyone by the river  
What is uncharacteristic is easy I have forgotten  
it is easy for people to say one is not cruel that one being me

## When you situate the light

When I love you, the lyric appears:

In the afternoon, contentedness settles

I position my toes around a sun-warmed towel

and you feed me chips as I write. Then you feed yourself,

crunching one chip and a few

and then self-restraint.

At night, bed is not bed without you.

The thawed lawn is wet, and its lack of cold keeps us there until.

In light, I see you, your body disrupting the nothing.

Your body responding to cold kitchen windows

now steamed, to buds, minute and alive, on the apple tree outside.

Your body greets the dog as she wags ferociously, begs for you.

Begs the dog greet you so ferocious

I beg the light, the wag, the you.

You receive my song

in what is a lull

or a fervor

a patient occupant.

## Can't Sonnet

My student wants his guns to write of guns.  
His guns dirt-playing, his guns at range, panting.  
Guns have their business plans and dreams, they swing  
their circle mouths, their conversations won.

I'm not equipped to give revelation  
clung sticky thick to a child's tiled skull, can't  
give him what I want to give him. Can't  
rhetoric. Can't reciprocation.

Can't eye. Can't for an eye. Can't for a mouth.  
Can't eardrum snap the nose the empty cave  
no snot. Can't gun the gun. Can't no one save.

No room. Grip squeeze the sweaty torso now  
unfold. The kneecap unhinge clench. Now shave  
the body's face. Which body is a face.

## Upon Waking

to taste what isn't in any way so exceptional: I sat  
in a tall leather chair and waited to be served: I put oil  
in my hair and let it fall heavy: my veins pumped with lack  
of moving: I didn't dream: I felt that yes my responsibilities  
in life were categorical: the pressure eddied: yell:  
yell into dry alfalfa: yell into the cooling plate: this wood  
table is much larger than it seems: the knife and fork  
made of tin: I longed to let my ears pop in water: I swam  
to Big Sur: I was not afraid of the swells: I smelled pine  
in the green, green water: I went to the gynecologist:  
she said my cysts were only mild: she said the hormones  
yes would only need to continue temporarily: I tasted dirt  
from my childhood home and it was certainly much drier  
than before: I ran out of the old car into the hot sun: I did not  
let my legs stick to leather: I felt no I will not need to shiver  
today: I visited a parking garage: I walked up all of the levels,  
following car routes this time: I saw no one: I felt invincible  
only every other moment: I saw my writing desk in the parking garage:  
it said I am here to serve, not to be disposed of: I am just trying  
to do what I can, it said: I did what I could



## NOTES

p. 16: The idea of wrapping saran wrap around the body is from *Viability*, by Sarah Vap.

p. 43: Lines 5-6 and 8-9 are Pema Chodron's.

p. 47: The last stanza is referring to Sarah Vap and *Viability*.

p. 53: "Information and pornography are the same" is from *Garments Against Women*, by Anne Boyer.

